Email notice sent to hospital data reporting contacts on February 3, 2009

Is your discharge data saying something about your emergency department and patient population that just isn't true?

This is an issue that affected several hospitals during the first half of 2008 reporting, due to inappropriate use of the Type of Admission and Source of Admission codes related to transfers from hospitals and emergency department admissions. On October 1, 2007, the National Uniform Billing Committee changed the UB04 definitions of Source codes 1, 4 and 7, and the state of Arizona adopted those changes. However, in reviewing the 2008-01 data it became apparent that some hospitals are not using these codes as currently defined.

One example of this problem observed in the 2008-01 data was hospitals coding all of their ED patients with Source code of "7" and Type code of "1." When a hospital reports this, their data is stating that 100% of patients treated in the ED were patients that required immediate medical intervention for severe, life threatening or potentially disabling conditions. No runny noses or sprained elbows. Obviously, this is incorrect, and the result is data about this hospital ED that is not only inaccurate but extremely misleading.

Here is why correct coding in this area is so important: one on-going problem with most hospital emergency departments is the number of patients who use the ED instead of other, more appropriate care providers for routine or moderately urgent medical issues. EDs are over-burdened, and struggle with uncompensated care for patients who didn't really need ED level of care. The hospital data should support the hospitals' statements on this issue. However, if all ED patients are coded as "emergent" the data says the exact opposite!

Following is a brief review of the current definitions of the affected codes:

Source code 4 – Transfer from a Hospital: this definition now includes persons who were *outpatients* at the sending hospital. Therefore, if you treat a patient in your ED that was transferred to your hospital from another hospital's ED, the source code would be "4." If you subsequently admit that patient as an inpatient, the source code would still be "4."

Source code 7- Emergency Room: this definition *does not* include patients transferred to your hospital from any other health care institution. This code is to be used for patients brought in by transport or *emergent* self-referrals. The qualification of *emergent* is important because *non-emergent* self-referrals are to be coded with a Source code of "1 – Non-Health Care Facility Point of Origin."

Type of Admission and Source of Admission relate to each other. This is particularly important when the Source code is "7" or "1," because the definitions of these two source codes are based partially upon the priority (Type) of visit. The definitions discussed above are found on pages 34 and 35 of the National Uniform Billing Committee UB04 manual for 2009.